

Beware!

Philippians 3

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Romans 2 17-29

Congregational: Genesis 22 15-18

Last week ending up Chapter 2 we saw a different side of Paul. We saw a more personal side when he talked about Timothy and Epaphroditus, and his desire to send them to minister to the Christians there at Philippi. Paul says here starting out verse 3, “Finally” but as we know there is still plenty more to come.

He says here that to write the same things is not tedious for him, but for them it is safe. Paul never apologizes for using repetition in his teaching for I think he understands that we are forgetful, and it is through repetition that we learn, and that is how we commit things to memory. Sometimes we have to have them pounded into our brain over and over again before they will stick.

Paul even instructed Timothy in the use of repetition in his teaching, 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, chapter 2, starting in verse 11. “This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” Now here comes the instruction from Paul, verse 14. “Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.”

It is true that we often need to be reminded of God's love and grace toward us. How many times has God allowed you to struggle through something, just so in the end you can be reminded that he is faithful, and gracious toward his children. We are so quick to forget the things that God has done for us in our lives, how quick we forget his deliverance when he leads us out of temptation and how quickly we can fall back into it. We need to be constantly reminded that we are no longer slaves to such sins and temptations. Christ died so that we may be free, so why do we keep entangling ourselves in it?

Some of the reason I think is because we forget God, we do not have him foremost in our mind, and so we start to drift. Paul says we are to hold every thought captive, not let our minds idle, and fall into sin, but to guard ourselves. When things are going great, often times we just ride with the flow not realizing how good it is going, or how good we may have it until God allows it to be taken away and reminds us how much we really do depend upon him, and how far do stray and forget his grace, his mercy, his love.

This is one of the reasons why the church gathers weekly, so that we can be reminded, so we can gather together, worship together, pray, and reflect on God's grace toward us. Even the weekly services serve the purpose of repetition to bring God to our forethought, and remembrance. This is why it is dangerous to forsake the gathering of believers. This is one of the reasons why we need each other, why we need to meet together, why we need to spend time worshiping, and rejoicing in our savior and recalling and sharing how he has worked in our lives.

We can't do that if we aren't here, we can't do that alone sitting in our own homes on Sunday. We live in a society that sees the church services as secondary, we even see it among some Christians who do not make it a priority. What has Paul been talking about largely here in Philippians, what is really his main focus here?

I would say it is Unity, coming together to worship, being of one heart, of one mind, conducting ourselves worthy of the gospel of Christ. So when we see Paul here, repeating himself in this letter to the Philippians he says it is not tedious, for he knows how important it is. It would appear that Paul may have been going to actually end his letter here. Often times he ends his letters with a personal note like this one, greeting people, or reporting on his ministry but we see here in chapter 3 that he starts into something different.

For whatever reason Paul felt it was necessary to issue a warning to them telling them to beware of dogs, evil workers, and to beware of the mutilation. I think some of this shift in tone maybe be due to the simple fact that everywhere that Paul went there were always people who followed behind him who sought to undermine his teaching, bringing in false gospels, twisting Paul's teaching, and one of his biggest opponents was the Judaizers. Men who would come in, and try to influence these new Christians that to be true followers of God you must first become a Jew, you must be circumcised and adhere to the mosaic law.

I don't know what the situation was in Philippi, if it was like the one in Galatia or not, but either way we see that Paul felt it was necessary to warn them. And this isn't the first time we have seen Paul having this kind of harsh reaction to these false teachers. In Galatians he was calling for them to be accursed of God, damned to hell for leading those gentile Christians astray and away from the free grace and gospel of Christ into bondage under the law and tradition.

We also need to understand, that in Paul calling them Dogs, evil workers, and the mutilation is an incredibly harsh insult. We have Paul who instructs us that we are to model ourselves after Christ, to have mercy, to have grace, to be sacrificial, to love our brothers, and our neighbors, and even our enemies. Yet, we see him here slinging some very harsh insults to these false teachers. We live in a world now where this kind of criticism or language is not accepted, it would be deemed hate speech. Paul, referring to the Jews as the mutilation was to the Jews an insult of the highest degree. He was calling out to the forefront the very thing they saw as what set them apart for God, as being a practice of mutilation.

So how can Paul who tell us we are to model ourselves after Christ, to love as Christ loves, to give as Christ gives, then turn and call these Jews dogs, and the mutilation. Well, the difference here is that these who he is referring to are those who are attacking the faith, who are out to deceive, who are seeking those who they can pull away from the faith into their false belief. These men are false teachers, actively seeking to hinder the gospel, they have become to put it simply, a tool of Satan working to lead people away from the truth of scripture into false beliefs.

The Jews believed that they were something special, just a little better than everyone else, and they were known for being those who are circumcised. They saw it as what made them holy, they saw it as the mark of God's promises to them, yet they were completely missing the point. Verse 3, Paul juxtaposes his argument with his insult. He calls these Judaizers the mutilation, then says in verse 3, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

This false doctrine, these false teachers are men who work evil, they are a false circumcision because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. This language that Paul uses here, this reference to their circumcision being false, and a mutilation doesn't really jive with the dispensational understanding of the separation of the nation of Israel and the New Testament church does it. Think about it for a minute, Paul is talking to gentiles, not to Israelite when he says that We are the true circumcision, where does that leave the nation of Israel? Where does that leave these Jews? Well we can find the answer to that in Revelations.

Chapter 2, verse 9. "I know your works, tribulations, and poverty ( but you are rich) and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

The dispensational idea that God has a plan for his church, and he will also one day fulfill all his promises to the nation of Israel doesn't really seem to fit here. If we read in Revelation 3 verse 9, we see that there is a plan for them, for these false teachers, for the mutilation, for the synagogue of Satan. God says starting in verse 7, " And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens, I know your works, See I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name. Indeed I make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."

Just imagine for a minute, these Jews here in the bible, thinking they are righteous, thinking they are mighty, thinking they are favored of God, and God says here, that they will bow and worship at the feet of Christ whom they denied and crucified.

That pretty much destroys the dispensational end time view for Israel. This doesn't sound like the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. No, those promises belongs to the true Israel the true circumcision. That is what the new covenant was all about! The outpouring of God's grace upon us so that he may reconcile people of all nations to himself. It was never just about the Hebrew Nation, we gentile Christians are not a side note, this is not a different dispensation of grace, a detour...scripture teaches that this faith was God's purpose and plan all a long. The law, and the prophets pointed to Christ, Christ does not point back to the law, but he came and he fulfilled the law, taking upon himself Gods punishment of the law for us.

Christ coming changed everything! IT is Christians who are God's people, it is Christians who will inherit the promises to Abraham, it is those who have faith in God through Christ who are Israel. It is not because of traditions, it is not because we keep a law, but it is because of Christ, and Christ alone. And you know, the old saying that says, no matter how much things change, things always stay the same is so true. The Christian church is rampant with false teachers today, people who seek to take away from the free grace of God, who seek to take away from Christ work on the cross and just like the Jews of Paul's day they want to bring in laws, they want to bring in traditions they want to bring in works. So many people today want to tell God's people how they are suppose to live, what they are suppose to do, and how they are suppose to act. Or they make salvation hinged on the decision of man, on the work of man to repent where repentance becomes a work and now God owes us salvation because of it. Instead of what the bible teaches that repentance flows from a new heart, it is not a work granting salvation but rather it is salvation that grants the work of repentance.

They like to point to Christ and say, now that you have Christ you need to fulfill all these requirements. There are various degrees of this, we see it in the homeschool movement, or the endorsement of political parties, or the quiverfull / quiver filling movement. They seek to put weights around our necks they seek to create and force a morality by imposing laws, and traditions and regulations upon Christians. They make secondary issues, main issues, leaving aside the sufficiency of Christ and seek to add their own sanctification.

These are those that Paul is warning against...evil workers, false teachers, those who would burden God's people and turn their focus away from Christ. To instead distracting them and weigh them down, hedge them in and use it to control them. Often times that is what much of this comes down to is a heavy handed control. No actually trusting in God's work, but rather taking it upon themselves to make sure that people remain holy. That is the end result of a works based salvation, it ends up not relying on God who is the one who grants faith to begin with, but rather on our ability to stay moral, on our ability to stay sanctified, even if that means that we have to control another person to do so.

Aaron used to ask, without law what keeps people from just straying away from God. And the short answer is....anyone want to wager a guess? It is Christ, we have gone through all these books of the bible over the last year and the same theme is found in all of them. God's people will persevere, God's people are faithful people, God's people do love the brethren, God's people are sacrificial. We do not need some bishop, or priest, or rabbi or pastor instructing us what we can and can not do, for we have the holy spirit working in us convicting us. We know what is right, and what is wrong.. we know when we sin, we know when we have strayed from God, we don't need arbitrary rules to protect us from sinning if we truly have Christ us.

What we need to do is guard ourselves against these teachers, against these people who focus on works, who focus on things of the flesh that make an appearance of holiness. As Paul says, we must beware of workers of evil, of those who deceive and lead us away from the sufficiency of Christ.

Not to be misunderstood, Paul continues on in verse 4 about the meaninglessness of the works of flesh, of this works based faith, seeking to be justified by the flesh, verse 4. "Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so." Paul wasn't just calling these Jews names, he completely understood exactly what they taught, and what they believed because he was one of them.

Verse 5 "circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. " Paul was the Jew of Jews, he was actively hunting down Christians and imprisoning them, or having them killed all in the name of God. Until God appeared to him on that road to Damascus, and changed his life. We can see why Paul is so harsh and has little patience with the Judaizers. He was one.

He was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, he was born a Jew and was not someone who had been converted later in life, and not only that he could trace his lineage back to Jacob, who God gave the name Israel. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, who were those who could trace back to being born of Jacob's wife Rachel, the only son actually born in the promised land. But not only that, also from this tribe came Israel's first King, Saul, and they were the only tribe to stay true to Judah when the kingdom divided.

As if that was not enough, Paul continued, not only was he born a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, he grew to be a very devout Jew, a Pharisee, who were very religious and known for loyalty, patriotism, and strict observance of the Mosaic Law. And was very Zealous for his faith, he says he persecuted the church, which shows his enthusiasm for his religion that he would go and imprison and kill those he saw as heretics. And he goes on to say, of righteousness, blameless. It wasn't that Paul was perfect, but he did all that was required of him by the law, animal sacrifices and such.

All of these things gave Paul a high standing among the Jewish leaders. Paul was on the fast track to success and was seen as a very devout man, true to God, true to his nation, and I am sure along with that came power and prestige and a higher social standing, yet he counts all of that as a loss as far as faith, and God are concerned. It is interesting to note that while he appeared to have everything going for him, fame, and glory, he counts all that as rubbish. But now, that he has Christ, he has lost all of that and we see a picture of that in 1Corinthians 4:11-13.

“To this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted with endure; being defamed we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” Paul lost it all as far as it would appear to man, but gained everything in Christ. When powerful, he counted it as rubbish.. when poor hungry and homeless he rejoiced in the riches of Christ.

We see all of this in Verse 8” Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” Paul understood that all of these religious works of the flesh, these outward showing of religion was meaningless when it came to true belief and faith in Christ. He understood that it was not about a certain nationality of people, but about a nation of God's people drawn from all nations of the world. The new testament is clear that there is no righteousness of the law that man can achieve. That is what Paul is saying here, if there was any righteousness to be found in the law, he would then be the most righteous. Yet, it is all rubbish, and counts as nothing toward God.

He continues and says in verse 9 “ and be found in Him not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being formed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” It is far better to be found in Christ, to rest in Christ, then to have your hope set upon your own works based righteousness. Having this faith which is from God, allows us to know him, to recognize him in a personal way, not vicariously through a priest, or some other mediator, but directly because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

And all of this Paul says is so that he may know Him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. Charles Erdmen said “ Such fellowship in the sufferings of Christ includes turning from sin, and death to self, it may involve much hardship for the sake of Christ, and for Paul it ultimately led to his martyrdom.” But this is exactly what the Apostle Paul was rejoicing in, that one day he would personally experience the power of the resurrection.

So, what can we take from this? I think first and foremost is that righteousness comes by faith, and by faith alone and not by works. It is a gift of God given to us, not something that we have earned. True faith will produce works glorifying our father who shows us mercy and grace, and works alone will only produce a false faith, a faith like the law keeping Jews who God calls in Revelation a Synagogue of Satan. And the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing that we can take from this, is Paul's instruction to guard ourselves from this false belief and these false teachers who are seeking to lead God's children astray from a faith of God, and by God's free grace and adding to it works for justification. Beware of these dogs, beware of these evil workers, beware of the mutilation, beware of those who take the truth of scripture and twist it and use it to control, and have power over you.

And to rejoice in the Lord always